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DEFENSE FORUM FOUNDATION  
Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forum

*“Follow the Dragon Tracks: China's Emerging Presence from South  
China Sea to Facilities Access in the Indian Ocean”*

SPEAKER:

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**Introduction and Moderator:**

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**President, Defense Forum Foundation**

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**Suzanne Scholte:** Good afternoon! If I could have everyone's attention, we're going to get started. My name is Suzanne Scholte; I'm president of the DFF and I'm very honored to welcome you to our forum today. For those of you who are attending for the first time the Congressional Defense and Foreign Policy Forums began in the 1980s as an opportunity for Democrat and Republican staffers to come together to hear expert speakers on critical issues our country is facing. We have a long history of bipartisanship with many Republican and Democrat members of Congress helping to sponsor these programs. And we always promise an expert speaker, a critical topic, and perhaps most importantly the opportunity for you to ask questions. I want to thank Stacy Whitehouse from Congressman Womack's office for helping get this room and also the technical stuff – which I'm terrible at. I appreciate that very much.

Last month we had Dr. Walid Phares as our speaker talking about ISIS and the war on terrorism, and today we are looking at another issue of strategic importance to the United States: China's growing capabilities and their rising naval presence. As our chairman Ambassador Middendorf, who very much wanted to be here today, always reminds us, it's not the intentions of potential adversaries that we need to worry about as much as their capabilities because intentions can change overnight, but capabilities are there. And he's always emphasized how important that is, and I can't imagine a better speaker to talk about both capabilities and intentions than Dr. Andrew Erickson.

Dr. Erickson is an associate professor in the Strategic Research Department at the Naval War College and a core founding member of the department's China Maritime Studies Institute. Since 2008 he's been an associate in research at Harvard University's John King Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, and an expert contributor to the *Wall Street Journal's China Real Time Report*. He's been a scholar escort for Members of Congress when they've been travelling to Asia, and also a scholar escort for the commander of China's navy when he was at Harvard. Dr. Erickson has been a briefer for the Chief of Naval Operations, the Secretary of the Navy, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, as well as many Members of Congress. In addition to publishing hundreds of articles and scholarly works on China, he is co-founder of China Signpost, a research newsletter and web portal that covers key developments in greater China. He received his Ph.D. and M.A. at Princeton University and graduated Magna Cum Laude from Amherst College. He studied Mandarin at Beijing Normal University's College of Chinese Language and Culture, and Japanese language, politics and economics at Doshisha University. And I also learned at the table that you started studying Japanese at the age of 8. So it's really a wonderful honor to have Dr. Erickson with us today. Thank you very much. **(Applause)**

**Dr. Erickson:** Well thank you very much, Suzanne, for that kind introduction and thank you everyone for coming out today. I know, as usual, it's a busy time on Capitol Hill, with many other competing concerns not least of which having to do with Iran, and how we're going to keep developing our military capabilities, so it's just a real pleasure to be here with you. What I'm going to try to offer over the next half hour before I open it up to your questions and our discussion are some suggestions about the overall dynamics in China's military development. Clearly China's engaged in extensive military development, rapid military development, but how are we best to understand this military development? What are the most important areas of that development? Particularly the ones that we will need most to deal with, and respond to in some fashion. And so, a lot of this is going to be geographically oriented, starting with this map right here, which you're going to see again. Now of course all of these are my personal views; as you know, they don't represent the policies or estimates of the U.S. Navy or any other organization of the U.S. government.

Now, I want to start with something very abstract here, and please bear with me because I think it's important. If we're trying to figure out both China's intentions and its capabilities development, I agree; we have to focus on capabilities as the bottom line because intentions can indeed change. But if we're trying to understand both, I think we need to look at China's hierarchy of strategic priorities as they have evolved since 1949. What we see here is generally a fairly clear prioritization. I would argue that this is quite different from the Soviet Union, which overextended itself. China's strategy in developing its military capabilities and overseas influence, I would argue, has been far more intelligent than that. So turning to this water droplet metaphor here, at the very top are the Chinese Communist Party's priorities, as represented by this little sphere, of staying in power to develop the country in the way they argue only they can do. That goes above every other priority, that's why the People's Liberation Army is a Party army. It is not a professional army in the way that Western democracies enjoy. Below that, next in priority, is this sort of pyramid of parallel Party and State structure that administers China. Keeping that working effectively and in place is China's next strategic priority, I would argue to you. Then below that is control of and stability within the core ethnic Han homeland of China. That area must be controlled stably for the Party to stay in power and that is a top priority. Next in priority is an outer ring within the boundaries of today's PRC [People's Republic of China] of ethnic and religious minority borderlands. Stability, too, is a priority there but things are somewhat different than in the core Han homeland and I'm happy to talk about that later in the Q&A. Next, we have China's land borders as well as its maritime borders, and in the next layer out are what China calls the "Near Seas" – the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Yellow Sea. Beyond that are the so-called "Middle" and "Far Seas" to include the Indian Ocean which I will also talk about today.

What I want to argue to you – and why I think this hierarchy of strategic priorities is so important to first depict in the abstract before we put it all down on a map – is that if you look at the CCP and its party armies activities and priorities since 1949, the effort is always to master the top priority before moving to the next set of priorities. So before 1949, the CCP and the PLA did not formally have a state to control. Acquiring that was the first priority. Then, getting, seizing the capital, the administrative apparatus, and the core Han homeland was the next priority. After that, stabilizing the ethnic and religious minority borderlands over the course of the Cold War through the end of the Cold War, stabilizing the borders. And then, finally, as we're seeing in the Post-Cold War era, moving out to the Near Seas as a major area of priority. There's some movement out into the Indian Ocean as we'll discuss, but this is the next layer of priority. It's contingent on a certain degree of progress in those inner rings.

So, the nature of China's military development today is very geographically correlated, and still somewhat uneven, but quite powerful in aggregate. This is a theme that I'll touch on in various ways throughout these slides here. The implications for this pattern of Chinese military development is that from the perspective of U.S. national security and that of our allies in the region, the real primary area of concern is what China calls the Near Seas. That's where China already has a wide range of tremendous capabilities that it can bring to bear. It's true that China is already pursuing reach and influence out into the Indian Ocean, but as it does so its own forces become vulnerable much in the same way that it is working diligently to be able to target our forces

operating in this Near Seas area. So I'm not saying that there are *no* concerns associated with that, but I think it's a very different level of intensity and Chinese capability that we see vis-à-vis the so-called Near Seas. Again, putting it on a map here, I've shaded the Near Seas as the most intense area, and then a further anti-access area-denial [A2/AD], or counter-intervention buffer zone that China's trying to develop with its weapon systems beyond that. And then when we look at into the Indian Ocean, with very important energy and trade routes, China also wants to have more influence there – but it has more options to pursue its security, and more vulnerabilities in attempting to do so unilaterally and solely by military means.

Now, Suzanne told me that it was essential to cover the South China Sea first, and I think this fits very well into this spectrum that I'm discussing with you. Within the South China Sea, I would argue that China's developing installations at Fiery Cross Reef are emerging as one of its important close-in militarily relevant facilities. And as I'll get to later in this presentation, the other bookend on this spectrum is arguably Djibouti; which is heading toward, I think, becoming China's perhaps first and most prominent Far Seas military facility – although China will not call it a “base” anytime soon, and it will not resemble an American full-fledged base anytime soon. So, as I think that everyone in this room knows well, there are a variety of Chinese-held features in the South China Sea. China's been augmenting these with the world's largest sand and coral dredging and construction projects, as well as starting to develop some very militarily relevant facilities. This area, the Spratly Islands, is a crowded area. Different military forces are occupying different features. So this is a very complex and sensitive environment. But China has clearly made a push here in the Spratlys and I think that Fiery Cross Reef is emerging as sort of coordination center of the roughly seven other features that China is developing in the Spratlys. This has been developed over time. Here, we see some basic preparations back in 1988. As late as 2007 a lighthouse was erected, but the facilities still were not very large – as you can see even in this picture from 2012.

So the real inflection point is 2014. That's when China started building up its South China Sea features on an industrial scale. China maintains that it was very restrained in the past and that other countries were the ones who were developing some airstrips and even pursuing some land reclamation, but in 2014 China rapidly blew by the efforts of all the other claimants in the South China Sea on a scale that none of them can match, *even collectively*. So again we can watch the development of Fiery Cross Reef. With these most recent photos we see a 3 km airstrip, complete with a taxiway, largely completed. Three kilometers is quite significant because virtually any Chinese military aircraft can operate off an airstrip this length. And this is the second 3 km airstrip that China has in the South China Sea. No other South China Sea claimant has even one airstrip of this level of capability. And all kinds of facilities and things being developed here where previously there was only a coral reef underneath the water.

So bringing together what China's able to develop vis-à-vis the Near Seas, a major focus in this area because it's the location of all of China's outstanding island and maritime claims disputes. And while China's military capability is still extremely uneven, close to China – with China's many land-based missiles and aircraft as well as ability to de-conflict systems and forces perhaps by both geography and time – China has a lot of workarounds, a lot of ways to compensate for its remaining limitations. These same workarounds simply do not exist far away from China, so that's a key geographical gradient we need to bear in mind when assessing what kind of military capability China can bring to bear in various theaters.

Now, I have an article coming out in which I describe this counter-intervention focus. There are different ways to call it. The U.S. military calls this “anti-access/area denial.” In China's own doctrine it calls this “active defense.” The bottom line is that offensiveness is typically in the eye of the beholder. The important takeaway is that China is really focused like a laser on developing systems that can challenge foreign forces, to include those of the U.S., trying to operate within the Near Seas area in the event of a crisis or conflict. China does not actually seek a war. What they want is a type of deterrence that extends into peacetime to convince the U.S. that it shouldn't intervene, and to thereby convince China's neighbors that they have no choice but to negotiate with China on China's terms to resolve these outstanding disputes. China has developed many very potent weapons systems in this regard. Perhaps in some ways the most exotic is the world's only true anti-ship ballistic missile.

But this is just one of many, many Chinese anti-access area denial systems here. And again, when we overlay the range rings of some of these important systems to include both missiles and aircraft – if you can imagine the inner ones stacking up to a darker shade – we can see how focused this remains on areas close to China.

A lot is at stake here. I had the honor to testify before the Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday afternoon on South China Sea issues, and one of the points I made was that this is about key norms and laws that make the global system function. We can't let China carve out the Near Seas as a zone of exceptionalism in which these otherwise international-system-sustaining norms are subordinated to China's parochial priorities. This doesn't just matter in the South China Sea. In matters in 38% of the world's oceans [claimable as Exclusive Economic Zones], as you can see here. And I know that a big thing on Capitol Hill now is the issues with Iran and Iran's nuclear program. Well, whatever we allow to happen in the South China Sea in terms of norms and laws is going to have implications for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and I believe that we're going to have to engage in a lot of careful monitoring on what Iran is up to. So we can't give any further excuses for Iran to say: "Well you're not fully pursuing freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, so don't try to do that in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz." No. We need to support one global system as informed by international norms and law where nobody needs to fear operating legally in international waters and airspace.

Now moving further to looking at the Far Seas... for purposes of simplification, I'm juxtaposing the Near Seas and the Far Seas; obviously it's a continuum to some extent. The further China goes out into this area, the more it lacks the advantages it has close to home, and the more it's subject to some very significant military vulnerabilities. So, yes, as I said we're seeing more Chinese reach and influence, but in no way should it be conflated with the level of capabilities that China is starting to muster close to home. And one good way to look at that is examining it through the lens of China's developing aircraft program. Yes, China is gradually becoming one of the only countries to develop a major aircraft carrier program, but this is a gradual thing. It's not something that China can master overnight, by any means. So China's first aircraft carrier – not fully operational in its air wing, which is where it absolutely counts – was imported some years ago from Ukraine and outfitted. It has very modest capabilities.

Now, it's captured China by storm – a lot of nationalistic excitement. And those of you who are familiar with carrier operations know that when the shooter on the deck authorizes the aircraft to launch, this is sort of the stance that they take, as interpreted here in Chinese social media. It's hard to imagine this level of enthusiasm in the U.S. because we've enjoyed decades of a strong military and complex carrier operations. In China though, the idea of finally having some capability is really exciting and it's very personal to a lot of people. But this is by no means an impressive aircraft carrier as compared to U.S. capabilities. Now in 2013, I had the opportunity to take my scholarship to sea aboard *USS Nimitz* by going between San Diego and Hawaii and giving 24 hours of briefs on China and 1 hour on North Korea. And I wish Suzanne were there to help out with that. But I got to see first-hand just how sophisticated and capable the U.S. is at aircraft carrier operations and it gave me a better perspective to see just how far behind China is, and that literally decades will be needed to catch up in that regard – if China indeed catches up at all. Now, they've had some advantages, as you'll see in the next few slides. They don't have to reinvent the wheel on all these carrier operations that we expended decades to master. So you'll see a lot of very close similarities here. Even down to perhaps, it's a slight stretch, but here's my stateroom at the top at *Nimitz* and here's a corresponding Chinese stateroom. The point is, though, they're nowhere close to equaling us here. I don't think they feel they need to anytime soon. They feel like they have to start somewhere. A particular weakness for China remains the carrier aircraft. Again the J-15 bears a striking family resemblance to the Sukhoi-33, but a real problem for China is it's not easy to just reverse engineer and copy a high performance aircraft jet engine, and that remains a real limitation. They still rely extensively on Russia for those capabilities, and like carrier aviation development that's not something that can be solved rapidly even with China's level of resources and defense industrial base.

Now, I'm not saying I don't have any concerns of China's aircraft carrier program, and what I want to highlight there actually takes us back to the Near Seas. Because, well, China's deck aviation program is nowhere close to

posing a major challenge to U.S. naval forces. To the smaller militaries and air forces of some of China's South China Sea neighbors, a basic aircraft carrier could already seem quite intimidating and worrisome, and indeed in various Chinese magazines and sources, there are discussions about where is air cover coming from in the South China Sea area and how could a Chinese aircraft carrier fit into that? And here's a quotation from, actually, the Chinese naval officer who was in charge of Chinese forces in the 1988 Johnson South Reef Skirmish in which China seized several reefs from Vietnam. And he argues quite explicitly: "Look, if we had an aircraft carrier at that point it would have been so much better and so much more effective for us." So these are some concerns that I have.

Turning to the Far Seas, the missions that China can hope to accomplish so far tend to be more basic – presence, reach, influence. That already, of course, will be valuable for China. We've seen China use its anti-piracy missions to vector some ships to help secure citizens that have come in harm's way. In Libya, for example, in March 2011; and most recently also in Yemen. Building Chinese soft power through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, improving China's image in the region – this is certainly something China wants to do. And also sea lane security. This is more of a long-run goal. Already China can handle the low end of this, but getting up to high end high intensity sea lane security capabilities against another major navy... against another major military... China still has a long way to go there. The low end is exemplified by China's 6+ years of anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. 20 task forces and counting. And this has been a valuable way for China to learn as well as get credit for making some contributions to the international system. But a big question that will get us to our examination of China's potential access points in the Indian Ocean has to do with the issue of these anti-piracy deployments. These can't continue forever. They're quite expensive, especially with their being run out of something less than dedicated military facilities. Sooner or later, I would argue, and it may take some time, China's going to be thinking through: "How do we have presence and some support bases in the Indian Ocean even after this mission winds down?"

And so as I called attention to in the title of the talk here, I think we need to "follow the dragon tracks." Let's look where China's navy, especially in its 6+ years of anti-piracy missions, which ports it's actually called on. When you do the systematic laydown, some very interesting things emerge here. Obviously China has called on a number of ports in the region, and these tend to be correlated with countries in the region that China enjoys fairly good relations with. You know, you don't see India showing up on this list, for example. But it's only three ports that actually make the top level of approaching 20 or more visits. These are Djibouti; Port Salalah, Oman; and Aden in Yemen. Now, it seemed like for a while China may have been hedging its bets with Aden. It was located in a convenient spot, but I think they clearly observed the risks of instability in Aden. They knew about the *USS Cole* tragedy. So I don't think they had too many eggs in that basket. And with the tragedy of the Yemeni civil war, that's off the table largely for now. So that really leaves us for now, with the top facilities emerging looking like Port Salalah, Oman and Djibouti. And while every one of the 20 anti-piracy task forces, save the first, have called on Port Salalah, that type of cooperation, to my knowledge, I don't see the evidence that it's a full access point. Maybe a de facto access point, an informal access point, but as I'll show you in a second, recent activities in Djibouti appear to really be putting Djibouti in the lead for offering China support in this regard. Please take a look at this Q&A with the president of Djibouti, President Guelleh. He's been covered in the Western press in a variety of ways recently saying that, "yes we are in negotiation with China to offer them some sort of naval access and facility access." But I haven't yet seen any English-language sources that are quite as direct as this. And this is a Saudi owned newspaper in which the president of Djibouti appears to have given quite an extensive and authoritative interview in which he also recognizes the great support that Saudi Arabia has given to his country over the years.

So I have been inclined to take this very seriously. Look at how directly that he is being. The interviewer tees up the assumption that a Chinese base will be open soon. President Guelleh, bats away speculation or questions that Iran could be offered a facility, that India could be offered a facility. In other words, he is not just saying yes to everything, he is being very clear: what is in the cards, what is not in the cards. And what he says in the cards, is signing an agreement with China, with which Djibouti has very close ties – and you can see that clearly from the cooperation and the infrastructure projects, the blandishments in terms of Chinese aircraft and some

military equipment that Djibouti is receiving. So he is saying that as of June 1<sup>st</sup> perhaps we will sign an agreement officially after two weeks. I think things are happening on the ground in Djibouti that are going to give China a significant access point there. This is a logical place for China to want to be, right at the edge of the Bab-el-Mandeb, the entrance to the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden; together with a friendly host government this is a logical place for China to start getting this more systematic access and facilities support that is going to need if it is going to have a more sustainable naval presence as these Gulf of Aden anti-piracy missions must gradually wind down at some point.

Now, in terms of where I think this facility is likely to emerge, various Internet sources are suggesting that the port of Obock is the likely location. I see that as logical for several reasons. First of all, it would be separated significantly from the port of Djibouti. Coming from Massachusetts, I am very used to thinking in terms of North Shore and South Shore. So, we can imagine the Chinese wanting to have a little bit of distance from the U.S., French, and Japanese facilities, which I understand are all clustered more towards the South shore. They would have a slightly separated area. As an added bonus, they would be even a little closer the Bab-el-Mandeb. In terms of the local Djibouti host government, what's in it for them, this is an underdeveloped area that they would have every reason to believe that China could help further develop. Seems like a win-win solution for both countries, and hence why I think... watch this space, I think a lot is more likely to come out here.

So bringing this all to a close to allow some time for your questions and for our discussion, I want to emphasize my belief, my assessment, that to understand better where China is heading with its military development and how it will most affect the U.S. and its allies in the Asia-Pacific as well as its security partners there, this is really a geographically informed issue. There is a geographical gradient of intensity of China's power that diminishes the further from China we are talking about. So, while I don't mean to diminish the ways in which China is reaching out and trying to influence in the Indian Ocean, I want to double-down on my emphasis on how much China is doing to try to have a very serious influence on what it calls the Near Seas: the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Yellow Sea. And I think that is the location of the largest concerns at this point. I think there are even some significant shared U.S.-China interests, the further away we go from China, the more China, I think, actually relies on the international system. How we can pursue those interests over time is perhaps a complex issue to be discussed another day. I think it is important to differentiate among these different dynamics so that we can focus our efforts like a laser on where we most need to have an effect and that time is already with us. Thank you very much, and I look forward to continuing this. **(applause)**

**Question 1:** Can you talk about China's cyber warfare program and how its fit into certain paradigms you discussed of regional power versus the larger scope?

**Answer:** This is a very significant issue. I am not a cyber-expert. I think that is probably one of the more difficult areas of Chinese capabilities and actions to assess solely using open source methods, which is how I conduct my analysis. That being said, I want to suggest at least one point, that I don't think the U.S. government is making sufficiently and I think should be discussed more on Capitol Hill to the extent that it is not already being discussed. There is a constant set of Chinese government talking points complaining about lawful U.S. surveillance operations occurring in international waters and international air space. China tries to conflate this issue with its non-standard minority-interpretations of international law that are squarely at odds with the international consensus agreed on by the majority of nations. On top of that, China tries to further blur the issue by referring to so-called "close-in" surveillance operations. The fact is based on international law, it doesn't matter how relatively close or far you are, as long as you are operating in *international* waters or air space. Where I am going with this respect to with cyber is, the next time that there is a complaint on China's part about perfectly lawful U.S. surveillance operations, the point needs to be made: what could be more in-close than various types of cyber intelligence gathering operations, intrusions? Nothing could be "closer" than getting into U.S. government computers and other systems. So, I think there are many ways in which we need to make sure that some issues are being connected and not being answered in isolation.

A further connection I would like to suggest, although it doesn't directly have to do with cyber: we can see from China's sort of Near Seas versus Far Seas approach a significant dichotomy that is likely to grow over time in terms of how its acts with regard to international law. On the one hand, in the so-called Near Seas – especially the South China Sea, I would argue – China adopts a very exclusionary approach. One Chinese argument is that the U.S. should not be extensively involved in the South China Sea because “the U.S. is not a South China Sea power.” China would much rather have its smaller South China Sea neighbors be subjected to bilateral negotiations with China wherein they don't enjoy security and support and solidarity with the U.S. or even with each other with ASEAN. By contrast, China is arguing that it is a “near-Arctic state,” even though no coastal part and no land part of China is truly close to the Arctic. China has pushed its way into becoming an observer on the Arctic Council. So this is yet another way in which China tries to argue that the U.S. should be pushed out of the South China Sea in terms of being recognized as a power that has relevance in that international body of water. We need to point out that China has been accepted as an observer into the Arctic Council, even though arguably the U.S. is more of a South China Sea power than China is an Arctic power.

Oh, and by the way, as many will know here, in terms of the RIMPAC exercises off of Hawaii, China complains about intelligence collection or surveillance operations within its claimed Exclusive Economic Zone, but now in both 2012 and 2014 RIMPAC exercises – in both cases – China dispatched a dedicated intelligence collection ship to operate within the United States' *undisputed* Exclusive Economic Zone. So let's tie these things together in a way that will make it harder for China to make these unsubstantiated assertions.

**Question 2:** So can you talk a little bit about the U.S. Army's specific pathways program and the some of the efforts of the U.S. military to collaborate with Southeast Asian allies and whether that is the appropriate strategy?

**Answer:** Thank you for that question. Given my place of work, I am more familiar with Navy programs, but I do believe that the Army has a lot of offer, particularly in language training, partnership and cooperation with a lot of these regional nations and their militaries. So I think that's a very positive thing that can be built on further. I am sorry that I am not very knowledgeable as much as I should be about a lot of those specific details. But it is a great thing to bring up.

**Question 3:** You sound like when you talk about the Fiery Cross Reef that you give it to China. It's just their property. What about the claims of the Philippines, Vietnam, and all the other claims? Have you just walked away from those, or do you accept China's exclusive right to Fiery Cross?

**Answer:** This is a very difficult issue here. I don't think at this point we see U.S. government policy gearing up to try and dislodge China from any of its features that it currently occupies. I think the priority, and what I mentioned in my testimony yesterday, and what has to be a clear bottom line, is that we will not support China dislodging any neighbors from any of the other features in the South China Sea. I think that needs to be the way that we look at this. China obviously is determined to hold the features that it currently has, and the features in the South China Sea are held by a variety of different nations. So given the way things have evolved up to the present, I think keeping a lid on things and preventing force or the threat of force being used may be the least-worse approach that we can adopt. But I think that we need to be very clear that we are not going to tolerate China seizing additional features from other countries in the South China Sea. That would be my bottom line.

**Audience member:** Do we accept this seizure?

**Answer:** I'm not authorized to speak on behalf of the U.S. government. But I think the consistent U.S. policy is we are not out to judge the relative merits of sovereignty claims, we are out to make sure that they are not resolved in a non-peaceful way and that freedom of navigation is upheld and that bullying and intimidation will not become the order of the day in the South China Sea.

**Question 4:** Thank you, sir, for this great conversation, fascinating topic. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about Chinese nationalism in the South China Sea, as you shared those pictures before of how that affects China's position in the region.

**Answer:** Well, certainly there is certainly a lot of bottom-up grassroots Chinese nationalism. This is enhanced, and I think driven in negative directions, by Chinese government initiatives particularly since 1989. And that's been very regrettable. So this so-called "patriotic education," it has exacerbated the situation. But this is not coming from nowhere. If you look at the period of Chinese history between 1840 and 1945, China did suffer greatly and there is a lot of very painful historical memory that is not just a part of the textbooks, which are of course very selective sometimes, but also a part of the family scrapbook, so-to-speak. So China's government tries to build on this sentiment and channel this sentiment, and that's why this is a key factor informing in how it is operating and acting and describing its policies in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. So on the one hand, as the U.S. devises its policy and implements it, I think we have to be clear: we are not trying to poke China in the eye gratuitously, but at the same time we are going to stand firm, as we have, for principles of international law and the use of force cannot be used to resolve disputes.

**Question 5:** Is there a silver lining to any of this in terms of China's assumption of some of the global norms in responsibilities, or are their norms antithetical to our norms? As we retreat, I guess, on a global stage, do they now have the potential to pick up some of the slack in terms of sea lane security and other humanitarian efforts and other things you talked about?

**Answer:** Well first of all, I don't think we are retreating on a global stage. That would be my argument. I think some people have conflated some different terms. I would argue it is not a true multi-polar world by any means, by any stretch of the imagination. The characterization of the international system I most agree with is what the late Harvard professor Sam Huntington called a "uni-multipolar world." So yes, it's true, various factors of globalization are indeed diffusing power relatively away from the United States and away from nation-states to some extent. But there is no other country, not even China, that is approaching or will soon approach the aggregate national power and influence of the United States. So I would first want to draw that distinction. I think by prioritizing the areas in which it most needs to have high-end influence and effect, including the Indo-Pacific region, the U.S. can retain the influence it needs and the high-end deterrence that it needs.

At the same time, I do think that there are some ways that we can build on our shared interests with China. Yes, *we do have some shared interests*, particularly the further away from China you look, the more outside these disputed areas you look, China indeed has benefited from the global system as much or more as any other country in the last few decades. We need to keep making that clear, and making clear that we will not tolerate critical aspects of this system – such as international maritime legal norms – being undermined. At the same time, when China, for example, feels that it must protect and evacuate its citizens from unrest in Libya and Yemen that is something we should fully understand and we have no intention of getting in the way of. And if they needed some help getting their civilians out and we were in the position to help, I see no reason why we shouldn't do that. My hope is that over time China will assume a greater share of the burden for supporting the international system. That is why I think Bob Zoellick's concept of "responsible stakeholder" was such a positive one. That's why I think it was so unfortunate that the current administration early on appeared to embrace a Chinese formulation so-called "new-type great power" relations. Rather than being new seemed to signal a Chinese intention to rope us into accepting an *old type* of great power relations – an antiquated approach belonging to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before where great powers would carve up different spheres of influence, smaller countries had no recourse to international rule of law. So I think as a government, we need to promote our own positive formulations that speak to a shared interest in the international system and supporting it. And even offer a path toward the sort of respect and status that China so clearly craves, in part because of the nationalism and the painful history. If you'll forgive me for quoting a line from one of my favorite movies, because I think there is none better to express this: we need to make it clear for China as with any other country, "with great power comes great responsibility." The more responsibility in a positive way they are willing to assume in the international system and provide public goods that are useful to all without trying to threaten

other countries, the more that we can recognize that and recognize that they are another major player in the system – even as I don't think we could conflate the overall power and say that China is equal in power to the U.S., because if you look at the metrics, that just doesn't add up any time soon in the foreseeable future. I don't think it is analytically accurate.

**Question 6:** Yes, Dr. Erickson. Thank you very much. I guess my question is, with the rising power of Chinese military steadily during the past 7 years, we've uncovered an intrusion on the United States. I believe China respects the powers and when I see our country seems to have a different priority, military versus other munitions. Do we give them an opportunity to seek and become more militarily aggressive? That's one question I have: whether over the past 7 years you've seen any change in our policy has had an impact on the expansion of the Chinese military.

Second question is China and Russia: they have a history together for many, many years. Have you seen in the past several years, that history sometimes repeats itself? Have you seen that connection has been reunited because maybe a lack of power of other countries?

**Answer:** Let me take your second question first. I certainly am disturbed by some of the actions of both China and Russia. And I think some of their cooperation together also has some very negative aspects. On the other hand, I think there are limits to how much they actually share interests and how much they actually are going to cooperate in-depth over time. I think they share under their current leadership some determination to try to oppose the U.S., weaken U.S. and allied influence, carve out spheres of influence in a very antiquated, 19<sup>th</sup> century way that we should not agree with or support. I think they have significant differences, though. I think they are very wary of each other. I think while China's rate of growth is slowing, it is highly unlikely to collapse in any way. It is going to keep gradually growing in power for the foreseeable future. Russia's future, in terms of overall power, I see as far more uncertain. It has a very weak economy that is trying to use to underpin this massive military buildup. I don't think that is sustainable in the long run. I think a lot of the challenges to the U.S. and the rest of the world from Russia in the longer run are ultimately going to stem from risks of some Russian weakness and coming apart in different ways. So I see a difference there. One way in which this can apply to the China situation is that Russia is very concerned about the growing Chinese population across border in Siberia. There is a lot of happy talk and a lot of bold pronouncements at summit meetings and in public. But in private it is a lot more complex there. In terms of China's military development and how does U.S. policy perhaps influence this, I would say, first of all, China has been determined to develop its military overall. So it's not as if that wouldn't have happened. I think there is widespread support in society regardless of what specific priorities the government would try to push. And some of it has to go back to this nationalism and the sense that "we should be strong enough so that we can't suffer this century of humiliation ever again."

That being said, I think it is all the more important that the U.S. and its allies and security partners send a signal of polite but firm resolve that makes it clear that we are not adrift at sea. We are committing to maintaining stability and norms in the region. We are not intimidated by some level of managed friction with China. China's leaders are quite clearly comfortable with some moderate level of friction. We should be, too. I personally think that a mistake that the current administration made early on was to engage in some rhetoric that I think made China feel more emboldened in this regard. Again, China was determined to build up its military no matter what, but we could have done better – and recently we have been indeed doing better – by not just appearing to accept this "new-type great power relations" concept when the U.S. should have offered its own positive image for the overall relationship, instead of appearing to accept the Chinese formulation. There is also another phrase that U.S. officials have used that I think is likewise unfortunate and which Chinese officials have tried to leverage, including Xi Jinping himself. And that is the so-called "Thucydides Trap." This idea that based on ancient historical patterns between a rising power and an established power, if heroic measures aren't taken, ruinous conflict is highly likely to result. I don't believe that is the default assumption that we should have in today's international system. I believe in progress in international relations, such as the U.S. has contributed over the decades to this better global system that we have now. If you compare 2014, 2015, with 1914, nuclear weapons,

globalization, international organizations, financial markets and transnational production chains have imposed a level of interdependence that I think makes this no longer a default assumption.

So between the U.S. and China: risk of significant friction? Yes, absolutely. Risk of even some fairly high level crisis: yes. But enough shared interest that there is no way that the U.S. should be so fearful that we should *unilaterally* shoulder the burden of restraint and concern for some degree of friction. So I think that U.S. officials should not be invoking, or appearing to invoke, either of those kinds of concepts. Because it sends the wrong message: that China can push and push and test us in new ways and we're going to bear a disproportionate burden to keep a lid on that. We can manage the situation. We are not going to have a war. I am fully convinced of that.

**Question 7:** I have another question not closely related to Chinese navy. About North Korea, I am very concerned about North Korean human rights issues. China and South Korea are getting very close: Xi Jinping and Park Geun-hye met twice or three times already. And Xi Jinping never met Kim Jong-un. My question is: do you have any opinion about what the real relationship is? Some say that despite the close relationship between South Korea, China is still closely allied to North Korea, and when North Korea collapses, sooner or later, then China will come to the rescue, that kind of thing. And if China comes in, the U.S. will prevent China's coming in or if China's coming in U.S. will produce a second Korean War where China and the U.S. will fight each other? Do you have some opinion on that kind of stuff?

**Answer:** Thank you for raising this very important issue. I firmly believe that when the history of our time is written, one of the most shameful things across the board will be the way in which this terrible and vile North Korean regime was allowed to imprison so many people, so horribly, for so long. And I absolutely commend Suzanne and everyone else who has been working on this. This could not be more important. While China certainly faces challenges and I personally disagree with many of its government policies, on the whole I see a positive future for China. I see China going in a better direction and its people having a better life. I regret to say that under the current North Korean regime, I see no road to a better future. I see a dead end. I see a giant prison for so many human beings. So this could not be more important. In terms of where China's policy is coming in this regard, it is my understanding that while there continues to be debate in China about how to deal with North Korea, it, the policy, continues to default back to propping up the current regime to maintain stability and maintain a buffer zone. Even though I think the internal debate and the different schools of thought have become more vigorous over time, this remains the default. Unfortunately so. In terms of contingencies and scenarios, I think that is very difficult to assess. But it is my understanding that there are some Chinese documents, Chinese analytical documents, at least some kind of military scholarly documents, that talk about potential contingencies, and how China might set up various types of screening and processing facilities for North Korean elites and other types of refugees alike. So these contingencies are clearly being thought through in China to some extent. To what extent China is willing to discuss them with other parties to include South Korea and the U.S., I am not aware. I guess what I want to emphasize is, my bottom line is, I think everyone should absolutely yearn for the day and try to work for the day when this North Korean regime is totally gone and the Korean people have an opportunity to reunify their country if they so desire without any outside powers trying to dictate that or get in the way. So thank you very much for raising that vital issue.

**Suzanne Scholte:** Thank you very much. That was great. (Applause)

**Suzanne Scholte:** Well thank you all for coming. And since you gave a great shout out about North Korea, let me mention there is a bill – very non-partisan – in the House, H.R. 757 sponsored by Ed Royce and Eliot Engel, that I encourage Members of Congress to get on board. There is a bill also in the Senate. I think there might be a couple of bills coming through in the Senate. There is a sanctions bill. To me, the North Korea Sanctions Enforcement Act is the greatest tool we have to target that regime and there is a big misconception in Congress and even in the Administration that our sanctions against North Korea are heavy and they're not. North Korea was taken off of the terrorism list because of the negotiations during the Bush Administration and a lot of the sanctions were lifted during those negotiations, so the sanctions we have against North Korea are extremely

weak and there is a big misconception about that. I just wanted to throw that in there. But thank you so much. I wanted to ask you, a couple of Senate staffers asked if your PowerPoint presentation was available because they wanted a copy of it, so I'll give you their emails. But thank you so much, Dr. Erickson. Thank you so much, y'all, for being here today. We won't be meeting in August because of the recess, but we will be meeting again in the fall.